



## **MAKING CONNECTIONS OAKLAND**

### **A Case Study for GCIR**

**By William Wong**

## **FOREWORD**

Increasingly, foundations across the country are recognizing that their grantmaking strategies must respond to the needs and contributions of immigrants. As our nation's demography continues to diversify, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrant and Refugees (GCIR) firmly believes that an intentional multi-ethnic and multi-cultural focus on immigrant integration, such as the Oakland programs profiled in this report, hold promise to strengthen both individual communities and the country as a whole. Based on extensive research and interviews with foundation and community leaders and policymakers, GCIR developed and continues to promote its Immigrant Integration Toolkit as a way to assist funders and encourage immigrant integration efforts in communities across this country.

In this publication, GCIR profiles Making Connections Oakland (MCO), a comprehensive initiative that helps newcomers gain an economic foothold and become full participating members of society. The program was designed to build united neighborhoods and stronger families through strategies that illustrate the cornerstones of GCIR's Immigrant Integration Framework: mutual responsibility, change and benefits; multi-sector involvement; and multi-strategy approaches. Each method has its unique strengths with regard to immigrant integration and is highlighted in this document.

As the examples in this report demonstrate, foundations do not need to build an immigrant integration program from scratch. Grantmakers can use resources that already exist in their communities to continue supporting their funding priorities. By merely exercising greater intention and capturing all segments of a community, immigrant integration endeavors can begin.

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## INTRODUCTION

As a community-change initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Making Connections Oakland (MCO) believes fundamentally that children do well when their families do well, and families do well in supportive neighborhoods. This philosophy reflects the mutual support and mutual responsibility principle that is a cornerstone of the GCIR Immigrant Integration Framework.

There are many areas in which MCO employs key principles of GCIR's Immigrant Integration Framework, including multi-sector involvement to promote social, economic, and civic integration. In addition, MCO illustrates an approach to strengthening communities that embraces the needs and desires of immigrants, refugees, and other community members. True to its name, MCO brings together various interests that have a natural stake in the Lower San Antonio (LSA) neighborhood in Oakland, California – residents, community-based organizations, city and county governments, faith-based organizations, and local funders – to help all low-income families and their children improve their economic circumstances, prepare their children for formal schooling, engage them as partners in bringing about positive changes, and empower them to advocate for policy changes.

This multi-pronged approach necessarily involves immigrants and refugees, given the demographics of the LSA, which has no ethnic or racial group in the majority. “Look at this site; you can almost call it an immigrant-refugee site,” observed Deborah Montesinos, the local site coordinator of MCO. “Anything and everything that we do, we are thinking about multiple sub-populations. That is what makes our work so challenging and interesting at the same time.”

Early on, MCO recognized the language and cultural diversity of the LSA. For example, it provided seed funding to create a Multilingual Homeownership Center that helps immigrants and refugees buy their first homes. The center's housing counselors speak several different languages and financial institutions have bilingual workers to make the process easier for limited-English-proficient (LEP), first-time homebuyers.

With help from MCO, the neighborhood's first community newspaper, *San Antonio Unity*, publishes bimonthly in four different languages (English, Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese). Such access to information helps newcomers learn about community issues and how they can become involved. Translation services, provided at community forums where MCO is the convener or otherwise involved, also keep this linguistically-diverse neighborhood well informed.

To further bridge service gaps, many community-based organizations, which are MCO partners, serve immigrant and refugee families with key services. Their assistance ranges from linkage to affordable housing to wealth and asset building to employment and job training opportunities – all key components to integrating immigrants into a community.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS OVERVIEW

Making Connections is the flagship initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Its core strategy is based on the belief that the best way to improve outcomes for vulnerable children living in tough neighborhoods is to strengthen their families' connections to economic opportunity, positive social networks, and effective services and supports. Launched in 1999, Making Connections is a decade-long effort to demonstrate

this theory in disinvested communities across the country and in full partnership with residents, community-based organizations, local government, businesses, social service agencies, community foundations, and other funders.

One reason the Casey Foundation chose the Lower San Antonio neighborhood in Oakland as one of its 10 sites nationally was due to its diverse racial and ethnic demographics, which include immigrants and refugees primarily from Asia and Latin America, African Americans, Native Americans, whites, and families of other racial and ethnic backgrounds.

“We thought the demographics were an asset because they reflected what was going on in society,” said Bart Lubow, a senior program associate of Casey who was the first site team leader of Making Connections Oakland.

Specifically, MCO aims its support and technical assistance at local collaborative efforts that seek achievable results in elevating the economic circumstances of low-income families and children, helping the youngest children become healthy and prepared to succeed in school, and engaging residents in the community-change process, making sure the initiative reflects an authentic demand from the community.

MCO began in 2000 with a 10-year commitment from the Casey Foundation to invest \$10-\$20 million in the LSA. Several priority areas are being targeted, including: health care, economic mobility, asset building, workforce development, resident engagement, and early childhood education. Finally, the Casey Foundation also hopes to effect policy changes that will sustain and open opportunities for families over the long term.

## **COMMUNITY OVERVIEW**

The Lower San Antonio (LSA) neighborhood sits immediately southeast of downtown Oakland and the city’s centrally located and family-friendly Lake Merritt. After World War II, suburbanization and an eroding economic base negatively impacted the LSA. White middle-class families moved out of the area and working-class African Americans moved in. It also became a gateway for immigrants and refugees, who came to the United States in large numbers following a major change in U.S. immigration policies in 1965 and at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. The LSA is one of the most diverse in Oakland, which itself is a city with no racial or ethnic majority.

In the post World War II years, large employers relocated out of Oakland, shrinking the number of good jobs available for LSA residents. Two new interstate freeways further impacted the area by isolating the neighborhood.

The neighborhood’s population of approximately 33,000 residents makes up about 8 percent of the city’s total. People of Asian descent or from the Pacific Islands are the LSA’s largest plurality – about 36 percent. Latinos comprise about 35 percent of the population; African Americans comprise almost 20 percent, and whites are an estimated 19 percent. By comparison, Oakland is about 36 percent African American, 31 percent white, 22 percent Latino, and 15 percent Asian.

Half of the LSA’s population was born outside of the United States, mostly in Latin America and Asia. About a third of the LSA’s residents five years of age and older do not speak English well (compared with 13 percent of Oakland’s population).

The mean household income of LSA families, according to 2000 census figures, was well below that of Oakland families -- \$38,820 vs. \$57,267. More adults and children living in poverty resided in the LSA than in Oakland as a whole, and more LSA

households spent 30 percent or more of their household incomes on housing than in any other area of Oakland.

## **INITIATIVE COMPONENTS**

### **Economic Integration**

#### ***Workforce Development***

The MCO workforce-development strategy is to create or enhance multiple interventions to help low-income residents of the Lower San Antonio neighborhood get better, more sustainable jobs. The employment rate in several core LSA census tracts was well below that of Oakland as a whole – in the mid- to high 80 percent range, compared with Oakland’s 92 percent employment rate. MCO sponsors or supports job-training programs in English and other languages to close those gaps. Overall, MCO hopes to impact 600 LSA households over the course of the 10-year initiative. To date, 100 families have received jobs directly or indirectly through MCO.

The medical and dental assistant programs run by Unity Council, a nonprofit that operates in both the LSA and the neighboring Fruitvale district, is available to English-speaking residents, while a construction job-training program assisted LEP Vietnamese immigrants and refugees. In addition, MCO helped two owner-operated cooperatives -- one for landscaping, the other for a “green” housecleaning service -- that provide economic opportunities for undocumented Spanish-speaking immigrants. Cooperatives are a way for undocumented immigrants to gain an economic foothold in the community within the constraints of their immigration status.

#### ***Asset Building***

MCO assists LSA residents, including immigrants and refugees, build wealth through savings programs and homeownership interventions. It has also conducted a financial-services survey aimed at attracting a mainstream bank, something the neighborhood currently lacks.

Only 45 percent of LSA households with children have savings accounts, compared with 70 percent of the city’s households with children. MCO’s asset building strategies aim to assist 1,300 households by providing financial literacy skills instruction as well as information on accessing earned income tax credits (EITC), finding homeownership opportunities, and starting savings accounts. As of the writing of this report, 300 new affordable housing units were in development, 240 residents gained financial education, and more than 400 families received free assistance with their tax returns and obtained their rightful EITC.

Three community-based organizations that are MCO partners operate free tax-preparation services. They are part of an Alameda County-wide EITC campaign. The free tax preparation assistance that immigrant and refugee families receive can build wealth unexpectedly. Over the past several years, hundreds of thousands of dollars have gone to LSA low-income families previously unaware of their EITC eligibility.

Cultural competency can be a barrier at times for this service. At each of the three community-based tax preparation sites, there is a determined effort to serve families who

do not speak English. A constant challenge, however, is to have enough translators who are familiar with tax-preparation and culturally competent.

The Savings Pathway Project, an MCO partnership with three neighborhood-based nonprofits, provides financial education workshops and counseling, and helps residents identify appropriate banking products. Reaching out to non-English-proficient immigrants and refugees is an intentional strategy for the project, and immigrants and refugees often play a leadership role.

Seven residents, with technical assistance from a nonprofit organization, conducted a multi-lingual community survey that asked 232 people who live or work in the LSA about their financial-service practices and needs. Conducted in late 2006 and early in 2007, the survey found:

- For two-thirds of the respondents, the nearest bank was at least 10 blocks away.
- More than one-fourth didn't have bank accounts.
- Almost 40 percent used more expensive "fringe" financial services, mostly for money transfers and cashing checks.
- Language access was one of the highest priorities, especially for bank staff.
- Residents wanted banks to help families save for their children's education.

The purpose of the survey was to gather data to persuade a mainstream bank to locate in the LSA. MCO and the resident social network it created, San Antonio Neighborhood Network, continue to work toward persuading a mainstream bank or credit union to take a chance on their neighborhood.

The Multilingual Homeownership Center at the Lao Family Community Development Corp., started with an MCO seed grant, enabled Lao Family to hire and train multi-lingual financial counselors. The center leveraged that initial grant to obtain support from local funders and banks. The center – whose staff members speak English, Spanish, Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Vietnamese, Mien, and Lao -- helps low-income families buy their first homes and assists them to deal with predatory lenders or foreclosures.

### ***Real Estate Council***

The Real Estate Council, part of an MCO work group, brings together nonprofit affordable housing developers to share information and not compete with one another. One developer, Affordable Housing Associates, partnered with the Eastside Arts Alliance to create the Eastside Cultural Center with affordable housing units upstairs. Other developers have some 300 affordable housing units in the pipeline.

### ***Community Benefits Agreements***

MCO supported several community-based organizations that organized LSA residents, many of them immigrants and refugees. They campaigned for a community benefits agreement (CBA) with the City of Oakland and the developer of a major housing project in their area called Oak to 9<sup>th</sup>. The groups successfully negotiated a CBA that includes a set-aside of affordable, family-sized units and pledges of jobs and training opportunities for Oakland residents, including individuals living in the LSA. Two construction job training programs –for Vietnamese immigrants and young adults – have helped some LSA residents get jobs even before the Oak to 9<sup>th</sup> project (currently stalled by legal disputes) is launched.

## ***Profile***

Yvonne Payton has been on both sides of the low-income equation. She is eligible for food stamps and other social services, and as a part-time worker at MCO partner San Antonio Community Development Corp. (SACDC), she helps low-income families find support and resources.

One of her tasks is to help low-income families get their EITC. During the 2007 tax season, a Spanish-speaking woman, who is a U.S. citizen, wanted to file as an individual. Her husband is undocumented and the couple didn't want to file jointly because they feared his unauthorized status would be exposed. Payton, with the help of SACDC staff member, advised the reluctant couple to file a joint tax return because doing so has advantages over an individual filing. That way, the couple could get \$5,000 in EITC, which the husband used to purchase a car, and a tax identification number that isn't a Social Security number.

"They were surprised and happy" to get their EITC, Payton said. "They didn't expect anything." The family – there are two young children -- also got food stamps for the first time. Payton used her own experience of getting food stamps to allay the couple's fear about the eligibility process.

## **Early Education**

### ***Garfield Catchment Strategy***

MCO wants to help the youngest children in the LSA become healthy and prepared to succeed in school. Working with children up to eight years of age, the Garfield Catchment Strategy is driven by a singular goal: have children reading at grade level by the third grade because that is generally when children read to learn. The strategy concentrates on Garfield Elementary School in the heart of the LSA. Garfield has a large Latino and Asian immigrant student population and low test scores.

The third-grade reading proficiency average in LSA schools is 13.8 percent compared 21 percent for the Oakland Unified School District. With a variety of partners, MCO is working to change that through the provision of health services, literacy assistance, pre-kindergarten transition programs, after-school programs, and parent education and leadership training. In the first two years of this early childhood education strategy, of the 113 third-graders the initiative hopes to impact the scores of 20 have already improved.

Partners include Garfield School administrators and teachers, the Oakland Unified School District, the Alameda County Public Health Department, First 5 Alameda County, the United Way of the Bay Area, the East Bay Asian Youth Center, Jumpstart, other nonprofit organizations that focus on early childhood education, and the Walter and Elise Haas Fund, a San Francisco-based philanthropy.

### ***Playgroups and tutors***

With an MCO grant, the nonprofit Lotus Bloom operates two playgroups in a space rented from the Eastside Cultural Center by Oakland Ready to Learn, an MCO organizational partner. The first playgroup, started on Saturday mornings early in 2007, is

open to children up to five years of age and their parents. It has attracted approximately 100 children and parents, though most of the children are two to three years old. The program has been so successful that Lotus Bloom started a second session on Wednesday mornings in September 2007.

The children reflect the LSA's racial and ethnic diversity – Mien, Chinese, Latino, Cambodian, African American, mixed, and white – and come from households that speak English, Mien, Chinese, Spanish, Cambodian, and Vietnamese. The staff speaks English, Spanish, Chinese, and Cambodian.

For two hours, the children and their parents engage in interactive, age-appropriate activities. In the third hour, they read books in five different languages. Lotus Bloom offers a free lending library so parents can take books home to read to their children. Forming their own social networks, parents also go shopping or visit museums and libraries together.

“We make sure our activities are multicultural by singing in English, Spanish, Chinese, and even using sign language,” Angela Louie Howard, executive director of Lotus Bloom, said. “Parents and children from different backgrounds are quite integrated. I’ve heard parents say that this is the first opportunity they’ve had to meet people of other ethnicities.”

A second nonprofit organization, Asian Community Mental Health Services, also runs playgroups two weekday mornings at the Oakland Ready to Learn space in the Eastside Cultural Center. The children and parents are primarily Chinese and Southeast Asian. The purpose here is to form strong bonds between parents and children to prevent future mental health issues.

Both playgroups are “a beautiful example of what could go on in the neighborhood,” said Jennie Mollica, the MCO project manager who oversees the early childhood education strategies. “They do these activities, but they also introduce families to pre-schools that may have openings.”

MCO partners with Jumpstart, a national program that pairs college students one-on-one with low-income young children in pre-schools. Jumpstart tutors both college students and elders and works in several pre-schools in the Lower San Antonio neighborhood that feed into Garfield. The Jumpstart tutors develop the literacy, language, and social skills of pre-school children, especially those unfamiliar with English.

### ***Summer Pre-K Program***

With First 5 Alameda County, which uses Proposition 10 tobacco tax funds to support the health and well-being of children through their first five years, MCO sponsors three summer pre-kindergarten camps at Garfield for children without any pre-school experience. Forty-eight children attended three classes in 2007, where linguistically and culturally competent teachers and staff members prepared the youth for kindergarten at Garfield. The Oakland Unified School District embraces this program, which started in 2005 and has grown from one class of 15 students to three classes of 48 students. However, more children could benefit from the summer camps: About half of the students entering Garfield's six kindergarten classes each fall have no pre-school experience, and many of them don't speak English.



## ***Parent Education***

At the urging of the East Bay Asian Youth Center (EBAYC) a Family Learning Center opened at Garfield in the autumn of 2007 and MCO teamed with the United Way of the Bay Area to underwrite the hiring of a full-time center coordinator. The EBAYC staff, fluent in English, Spanish, Chinese, Mien, and Vietnamese, took time to learn the types of services parents needed the center to offer.

Many parents of Garfield's youngest students are immigrants or refugees who aren't proficient in English and who have kept their children at home in their early years. The center teaches parenting skills to help prepare young children for school and refers parents to resources in the community that can facilitate quality early-childhood development.

The Garfield Complementary Learning Council (GCLC) is the governing body guiding the Family Learning Center. Representatives of the school, the school district, MCO, the San Antonio Neighborhood Network, First 5 Alameda County, the United Way of the Bay Area, EBAYC, and parents make up the council.

Several other EBAYC programs – with support from MCO – supplement the early education strategy. One provides parent aides in Garfield classrooms. Mayra Lopez, an LSA resident leader and a San Antonio Neighborhood Network (SANN) Community Builder, also conducts parent education workshops at Garfield, in both English and Spanish. Another EBAYC also provides after-school programs at Garfield (and other LSA schools) for students and their parents.

## ***Profile***

Ann Ha and Xin Ju Huang, both immigrant mothers, are regular visitors to the Lotus Bloom playgroup at the Eastside Cultural Center. Each brings her child – Kyle Jung and Carlynda Ng, respectively -- every Saturday morning to take advantage of the fun and educational activities offered by Lotus Bloom, a nonprofit organization MCO supports.

Both mothers speak Cantonese Chinese. Ann Ha's English proficiency is more developed than Xin Ju Huang's. Ha learned of a local Head Start pre-school program and decided to enroll Kyle. When Huang heard of this, she too decided to register Carlynda.

The Lotus Bloom playgroup is a first step for LEP immigrant parents to prepare their young children for school. The next logical step is a quality pre-school program offered by Head Start, a public preschool for low-income families.

"We get a lot of immigrant families who come to our program," said Louie Howard. "They develop some natural support networks."

## **Social and Civic Integration**

### ***Transforming Community through Arts and Culture: Eastside Cultural Center***

The Eastside Arts Alliance, a collective of four progressive arts activist organizations, has dreamed of having a community-based cultural arts center in the Lower San Antonio for many years. The alliance rented spaces in different parts of the neighborhood for its youth-oriented arts programs, which promote the idea of building community and empowering ordinary people and give young people opportunities to

channel their energies and practice different art forms, including video and sound recording, dance, and mural painting.

When Making Connections Oakland began in 2000, the alliance joined a collaborative to implement MCO's mission to help low-income LSA families and children. The alliance envisioned a cultural center as a concrete way to bring the diverse demographics of the LSA together, using art as a vehicle to build community.

*Newcomers bring artistic and cultural traditions that enrich their new communities. These traditions often strengthen inter-group relations and build stronger communities.*

MCO gave capacity-building grants to the alliance and supported its annual Malcolm X Jazz Festival. Through its participation in an MCO work group, the alliance became partners with a nonprofit affordable housing developer to establish a cultural center. That led to other partnerships with lawyers, architects, and local funders that yielded \$4 million in grants and loans to rehabilitate a three-story building in the heart of the LSA.

The building was transformed into two floors of 16 affordable residential rental units and a ground floor for cultural arts performances, workshops, and offices. The Eastside Cultural Center officially opened on New Year's Eve 2006 and now is a beehive of activity – classes for young people in dance, video and sound production, and graphic arts; performances and programs for all age levels; a community-oriented, for-profit graphic arts business; and a space for early childhood education activities and playgroups.

The center is fulfilling the alliance's vision of having a physical space to gather across racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and generational lines. For a struggling and marginalized neighborhood like the LSA, a cultural center serves as a safe haven to express art, culture, and community aspirations.

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### ***San Antonio Neighborhood Network***

The San Antonio Neighborhood Network (SANN) formed in 2006 with MCO's help as a mutual-assistance social network for residents and organizations in the LSA. SANN and its outreach workers, called community builders, put into practice several GCIR principles around communitywide planning, social and cultural interactions, and citizenship and civic participation.

With a storefront office in the neighborhood, SANN strives to be a strong social network for LSA residents of all backgrounds. It is a clearinghouse of information about services and resources that LSA families and children can use to improve their lives. It is also a community-based institution seeking positive community change.

SANN's community builders -- all LSA residents or workers themselves -- engage LSA residents to become SANN members and to be active in helping to improve the area. Representing different ethnic and cultural groups in the LSA, community builders participate in economic integration and early education strategies and aim to

build trust among the residents. The community builders and other LSA residents have attended the Casey Foundation's Resident Leadership Network national conferences and participated in its Resident Leadership and Facilitation Training workshops.

## **Neighborhood Grants**

MCO's Neighborhood Grants committee is run by LSA residents, who decide who gets small grants of \$500 to \$1,000. The resident committee designs the application, chooses the awardees, and conducts the follow-up monitoring. Grants are awarded to residents whose projects promise to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. For example, grantees might form a soccer league, start a community garden, or initiate a neighborhood clean-up campaign.

## ***Profile***

Before she had heard of Making Connections Oakland, Mayra Lopez was already a parent activist in the Lower San Antonio. When her oldest child, Roberto, enrolled in Head Start, Lopez began to attend the parent meetings. She soon discovered that she was one of only a few Spanish-speaking parents who actively participated because many of the others didn't understand English. Lopez, a bilingual Mexican immigrant herself, volunteered to translate – and word spread so that more Spanish-speaking parents began to attend the meetings.

In 2004, Lopez became involved with MCO. First, she volunteered at an MCO-supported free tax preparation service, translating for Spanish-speaking residents. MCO staff invited her to a resident leadership conference in Baltimore, the start of her Casey leadership training. It was in Baltimore where she first met two LSA neighbors who were doing volunteer community work. She also went through Casey's Resident Leadership & Facilitation Training (RLFT).

This leadership training has helped Lopez become even more active with MCO and the San Antonio Neighborhood Network (SANN), and she now facilitates meetings, sets meeting agendas, conducts parent education workshops at Garfield, and directs leadership-development and parenting workshops.

She credits her formal training for taking her to the next level of community involvement. "Before, my community work wasn't so organized. I didn't know how to put things together," she said. "Just from going to that first convening and sitting and listening to what other sites were doing, it was a light that just popped up and I thought, 'Hey, maybe I can be doing this, maybe I can help other parents.'"

## **CHALLENGES**

Mounting a comprehensive strategy to build strong, diverse neighborhoods comes with many challenges. The experiences of the MCO initiative illuminate many lessons that foundations may consider when they assess funding requests or consider developing a place-based initiative.

### ***1. Language and Culture***

Even though MCO has responded in many ways to the language and cultural needs of the diverse LSA population, addressing these complex and nuanced issues inherent in a diverse, low-income population remains a constant challenge.

Making sure there are linguistically and culturally appropriate documents and materials is a struggle that MCO faces all the time, as is having translators in meetings and community forums. “It is not an easy thing to create this massive social network that embraces all and then have this social network drive all service provisions in the neighborhood,” said Jennie Mollica, MCO project manager. “The cultural issues are multi-faceted.”

An example of a specific challenge in the early education area is MCO’s desire to help young students read at grade level by the time they are in the third grade. Many LSA children, however, aren’t native English speakers. They begin to learn English when they enter kindergarten, trailing children born into English-speaking households by five or more years.

## ***2. Aligning Identities and Missions***

Different ethnic and cultural groups have their own identities and goals, while a neighborhood as a whole may have a different identity and mission.

“There are valid reasons why people identify socially with people who have a lot in common with them linguistically and culturally. That can be their strength and their survival. That’s human and natural,” said Jennie Mollica, MCO project manager. “To identify with a neighborhood on top of that is not an easy and natural step, although I believe in a city like Oakland there’s a lot for everyone to gain in having some form of identification and feeling at home among differences and learning from that experience and feeling safe. That can be a goal of Making Connections.”

A similar dilemma holds true for the difference in focus of a place-based initiative like Making Connections, which unlike other non-profit service providers, targets a particular neighborhood. Another alignment challenge is reconciling certain government policies and practices with those of a place-based initiative. By definition, government services and programs generally are not aimed at specific neighborhoods. For example, fair housing and fair employment laws do not allow favorable treatment for residents of one particular area or one ethnic group.

## ***3. Resident Mobility***

Economically marginalized neighborhoods like the LSA also experience a high degree of mobility, which makes it difficult to measure the progress of interventions and programs designed to improve the lives of its neediest residents.

## ***4. Setting Priorities***

MCO’s strategies do not specifically address combating crime or working with at-risk youth, but crime, safety, and security are of utmost concern for many LSA residents. Engaging residents in economic integration or early education strategies is often a major challenge because most residents want crime and safety issues dealt with first or simultaneously.

## **5. *Being Inclusive***

African Americans and other U.S.-born families can perceive the sensitive and necessary response of the nonprofit world to the basic needs of immigrants and refugees as special treatment. A good program must incorporate an intentional effort to address these concerns on an ongoing basis, foster intergroup alliances, and focus the work on shared goals.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS**

- Design initiatives that are sensitive to language and cultural issues in ethnically diverse neighborhoods and ascertain that on-site staff is culturally – and if possible linguistically – competent.
- Support culturally competent and linguistically appropriate training for residents to empower them to participate in community-change work.
- Fund ESL scholarships for immigrants and refugees learning English, and support cooperatives for bilingual translators.
- Sponsor community forums and workshops that seek to bridge the cultural gap between different ethnic groups as well as newcomers and immigrants.
- Encourage community-based organizations to maintain diverse governance boards that include residents from targeted neighborhoods.

### **CONCLUSION**

The efforts of Making Connections Oakland to strengthen low-income families of the Lower San Antonio neighborhood are a fitting case study of GCIR's immigrant integration framework. MCO's strategies reflect GCIR principles and several of GCIR's pathways to integration, specifically communitywide planning; health, well-being and economic mobility; social and cultural interaction; and citizenship and civic participation.

The lessons learned thus far and the continuing challenges facing MCO are instructive for foundations seeking to have impact and influence on the fundamental dynamics of social change currently under way in America's cities and, increasingly, in maturing suburban neighborhoods. The challenges presented here can be viewed as an inspiration for creating innovative pathways to indeed make possible the American Dream for hard-working newcomers who bring their skills and aspirations to this country and who want to contribute to its vitality.